

THE HISTORY AND CONSTRUCTION

of

THE ROSSBURG INN

A THESIS PREPARED

by

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FOR INITIATION INTO THE

PHI MU HONORARY ENGINEERING FRATERNITY

of the

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

January 11, 1926

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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The writer wishes to acknowledge, with thanks, the assistance given him in the preparation of this paper by Dr. H. J. Patterson, Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Maryland.



## INTRODUCTION

Prior to the advent of the railroad, the chief means of transportation was by stage-coach over the turnpikes. The word turnpike was used for the earlier highways, because it was the system to collect toll for the use of these roads, and the person charged with collecting this toll would hold a long pike across the road, and, upon being paid the required toll, would raise the pike in order to allow the vehicle to pass. The raising of the pike gave rise to the word turnpike.

These turnpikes were very different from the modern improved roads. To begin with, there were no organizations charged directly with their building and maintenance as are the various state highway departments of today. New Jersey was the first state to pass laws creating a highway commission, and this was not until 1892. These roads were of the earth and gravel type, and, as a result, progress over them in bad weather in the heavy stage-coaches was slow. Then, too, the traveler had to know just where he was going and how to get there, for whereas today we have signs along our highways to inform all as to just where the road leads, in those days the trees along the road were notched and the traveler was guided by the number of notches. This applies in general to all of our roads, although it would be natural to expect that some were better than others.

The road from Georgetown and Washington to Baltimore was probably as good as any other in the east, for as remarked by a traveler over this road in Archer Hulbert's "Historic Highways of America", Baltimore to Washington was traveled with rapidity and safety equal to any mode of traveling in the east in 1796.

We, of today, would not think, however, that the travel was very rapid; for, whereas it now takes about one and one-half hours to go from Baltimore to Washington, in those days it took about half a day. At the height of the stage-coach era, when horses were changed every 10 to 12 miles, the running time was reduced to 5 hours. The price for this accommodation was \$4.00. When we stop to consider that the road at that time was very inferior to the present one, and the vast difference in the mode of travel, the 5 hours running time compares very favorably with the present one.

There are many points of interest along this old road that are worth mentioning. Not far from Baltimore is Relay, where horses were changed on the first regular line of railway transportation in the United States, prior to the introduction of steam in 1830. The first arch stone railroad bridge in America was built here and is still in service. At Elkridge were located the first charcoal furnaces in the United States to use hot blast in the top of the stack to make steam. The pipes for the famous Croton water works of New York City were made at this plant.



At Bladensburg, the road passes very close to where ships from England used to land their cargoes. Nearby is the battlefield where the American forces were put to rout by the British in the War of 1812 with the result that Washington was taken and many of the public buildings burned. Bladensburg was the favorite site for duels and many of our statesmen and army and navy officers have journeyed there over the old Baltimore and Washington Turnpike to settle their differences on the field of honor. Along the highway at Bladensburg are many old inns and taverns. These inns were a part of the old transportation system, as it was necessary to stop during the journey from Baltimore to Washington for meals, and in some cases travelers would spend the night at one of these places.

About four miles from Bladensburg, in the direction of Baltimore, stands another old inn which played an important part in the lives of the travelers along the Baltimore and Washington Turnpike. This inn is known today as the Roszburg Inn, although the older records show that it was a part of the Rossborough Estate.

## HISTORY

The Rossburg Inn is located on the campus of the University of Maryland at College Park, Maryland, and is one of the oldest buildings in that locality, being built in 1798. The writer has no definite knowledge as to whether the building was built expressly for inn purposes, but it would be logical to suppose that it was, inasmuch as it was used for that purpose shortly after being built. Located on the main thoroughfare, between Baltimore and Washington, 8 miles from the latter city, it served as a sort of breakfasting place for the traveler who made an early start from Washington, and a stopping-off place for others, where meals and lodging could be obtained. On his last visit to this country, General Lafayette stopped over night at this inn, while journeying from Baltimore to Washington, and slept in room 14 (see figure 2). This was on Monday, October 11, 1824, and the following morning a military escort was sent from Washington to conduct him to the capital city. This information, with the exception of the date, was given verbally to Dr. H. J. Patterson, present Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station at the University of Maryland, by a member of the military escort, and Dr. Patterson gave it to the writer in the same manner. Dr. Patterson also gave the writer access to a very old tracing of the building and the adjoining land from which figures 1 and 2 were taken. This tracing showed that the estate was called Rossborough, and contained 428 acres. This would indicate



that the estate was probably owned by a person by the name of Ross. In the early part of the 19th century, the inn was operated by John W. Brown who also drove one of the stage-coaches operated over the Baltimore and Washington Turnpike by Stockton and Stokes. This same person later ran the White House Tavern, an inn located about 2 miles further in the direction of Baltimore on the same road. The stables for the horses at the former inn were located to the north of the building and a little back from the road. On the same ground today stand the dairy barns of the University of Maryland. These, together with the silo, can be seen to the right in figure 5. There are 4 English elm trees that stand in front of the house. These trees range from 36 inches to 45 inches in diameter and tower above the house, which is 3 stories high. Being the only ones of their variety in the neighborhood, it is said that they were brought over from England, as were the bricks used in the construction work. A good idea of their size and relative positions with respect to the inn can be had by reference to figures 3, 4 and 5. The stone wall seen in figure 5 is a recent addition to the university campus and makes one of these trees fall outside of the yard. However, when we consider that the highway has been widened and probably has been shifted in location slightly, it is safe to presume that these trees were planted within the original grounds. By further reference to figure 5, it will be noticed that all four of the trees are to the left of the center of the building, and one would naturally suppose that

had they been purposely planted that some of them would have been placed to the right. There is one probable explanation of this, and that is that these trees have been struck by lightning quite often, and it is possible that there were other trees to the right, but they have been killed by having been struck. It is generally known that the trees now standing have been damaged by lightning, one such occurrence having been within the past year. The terrain along the highway in the immediate vicinity is flat and clear, and as the traveler approaches, these four trees, together with the red building, are caught by the eye long before the inn itself is reached. This is fairly well illustrated in figure 3. About 35 feet to the south of the rear part of the building is a well which gives a very good supply of water, and this well has undoubtedly been a source of supply since the erection of the inn. This rear portion was where the cooking was done and together with the well can be seen to the left in figure 6.

For what length of time the Roszburg Inn was used for inn purposes, the writer cannot say, but when the Maryland Agricultural College was established by the General Assembly of Maryland in 1856, the land upon which the building stands was made a part of the college. This land was from the Riversdale estate, and was owned by Charles B. Calvert. This same Mr. Calvert was one of the charter members of the corporation which operated the college and was the first president of the board of trustees. The capital stock of the corporation was 2000 shares of \$25 stock. The college was the second technical agricultural college established in the United States and at the



time of establishment the Rossburg Inn was the only building on the tract. The construction of other buildings began in 1857 and the college was formally opened in October 1859. During the early history of the school, the old inn was used as a home for the faculty. Mr. N. B. Worthington, president of the faculty from 1864 to 1867, made his home there. By an Act of Congress for the endowment of an agricultural college in 1862, the college was given funds by the Federal Government. By an Act of 1887, the Agricultural Experiment Station was established and \$15,000 yearly appropriated for the establishment and maintenance of Agricultural Experiment Stations in the United States. This was the first agricultural experiment station established in the United States and in 1892 the station was put under a separate director by the board of trustees. This experiment station is now in the Rossburg Inn, and the name of the station is painted on the building in large white letters. This is well illustrated in figures 3, 4 and 6.

And so we see that the old Rossburg Inn has stood for over a century and a quarter, and were it able to convey to us all that has transpired within its walls, I am sure we would have many interesting stories in store for us. It has been rumored that the old building is haunted and that there are blood stains on the third floor, but the ghost story is discredited by no other than Dr. Patterson, present director of the experiment station, who has slept in the building many times. During recent years, a Spanish coin was found in the building with the following words

on the obverse - "Carlos III Dei Gratia 1776". On the reverse side were the words - "Hispan Et. Ind Rex Me Irmi." These words, when translated, mean "Carlos III, By the Grace of God 1776" and "King of Spain, and the West Indies. Strengthen me." As to the history of this building, the writer has told all that he knows and wishes it was in his power to give other details that would be of interest. For what purposes it has been put to in the past, we have some knowledge; for what is still in store for it no one knows.

#### CONSTRUCTION:

Being constructed more than a century and a quarter ago, one would naturally expect that there would be certain features in the construction that would differ from the modern practices.

The building is constructed of red brick and has a mansard roof. The roof, however, is a new feature, as the original one was of the gable type.

The bricks were brought from England to Bladensburg, and hauled the remaining four miles over the Baltimore and Washington Turnpike. These bricks appear to be of the same quality as the common red brick used in this country today, but they are a trifle larger, being  $8\frac{3}{4}$  inches by  $4\frac{3}{4}$  inches by  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches, whereas the common red brick are  $8\frac{1}{2}$  inches by 4 inches by  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches. There is no uniform bonding in the brick work. In the front of the building the system appears to be one header for every



two stretchers in the same course, and a course of stretchers every six or eight courses of headers. This is not carried out over the entire front of the building, however, as there will be two headers for every two stretchers in some courses. On the sides of the building, the English system of alternate courses of headers and stretchers predominates, although this system is not carried out throughout the walls. Figure 7 is a section of one of the side walls where the English system was used. In the back of the building there is no definite system at all for more than five or six courses. In general the brickwork is in good condition, although there are a few cracks that have developed over or under the windows. One of these can be faintly seen over the right of the double window in figure 6. The bonding is accomplished by a plain joint about  $3/8$  inches thick, which is about that used for common brick work today.

The foundation is of rubble masonry up to the ground level. From there up to the first story it is a 19 inch brick wall and from the first story up to the roof, the wall is decreased to 15 inches. Figure 7 shows where the wall changes from 19 inches to 15 inches. The stone in the center of the picture is resting on the 2 inch ledge caused by the change in the thickness. The remaining 2 inches is taken care of on the inside of the wall.

The windows are 2 feet 10 inches by 6 feet on the first and second floors, but on the third floor front they are smaller, and built out to conform to the shape of the roof. This is shown in figures 4 and 5. On the first and second stories of the front,

there are white stone lintels over the windows, but elsewhere they are of wood.

The main door is in the center of the building and is 3 feet 6 inches by 7 feet. This door has a joint running its entire height in the center, which gives it the appearance of being two narrow doors being made into one. Near the top are two small glass windows 10 inches by 12 inches, and in the lower left hand corner there can be seen a patch  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches by 4 inches which has been put in since the door was made. Originally there was a hole in the door to allow the family cat to pass in and out at will. This was the practice during the period when the building was constructed. The knob is on the left hand side of the door as you enter, while the general practice today is to have the knob on the right hand side. The door sill is made of wood, the same as the window sills. The door is shown in figure 8. Above the door there is a semi-circular brick arch having a radius of 30 inches, and a keystone 13 inches deep, and varying from 14 inches wide at the bottom to about 8 inches at the top. This keystone has the following inscription on the bottom of it.

T. Coade, London  
1798

On the face of the stone there is carved the head of a man. The arch and keystone can both be seen in figure 8.

There is a porch 8 feet wide running across the front of the building. Whether or not this porch is the original, the writer cannot say, but from the general appearance of the building,



it would seem that a porch was built originally to properly set off the building. There are four concrete steps leading from the porch to the ground with concrete blocks on the sides of the steps. These can be seen in figure 8.

On entering the building from the main entrance, the observer is struck by the large hallway running the full depth of the building, and by the high ceilings. This hall is 8 feet 8 inches wide, and at the center, there is an archway that drops down about 14 inches from the ceiling at the crown. The ceiling is 10 feet 5 inches high, and the general appearance of the hall is improved greatly by the archway. At the rear and to the right side is a staircase which goes up to a landing. From this landing you turn to your left and proceed up another staircase to the second floor. To the right of the hall are two rooms and to the left there is one. These are shown on the plan of the first floor. The part of the building shown on the plan to the right and left of the main building marked rooms 1, 2, 7 and 8 were removed at a time not known to the writer. In each of the present rooms, there is a fireplace 3 feet 6 inches wide by 2 feet 10 inches high. These fireplaces are in the center of the rooms and the reason for being there will be evident when we consider the fact that fireplaces were the chief means of heating at the time the building was constructed. The partition walls between the hall and the rooms are of brick, and as a result are very thick, being 11 inches. The doorways appear rather low, but this is probably

due to the fact that the walls are thick and that they are narrow. They are 2 feet 9 inches by 6 feet 9 inches. The room to the left rear marked #5 on the plan of the first story was used for the bar, and had a staircase leading from it to the cellar. The kitchen is in back of the main building in keeping with the practice in those days, and is marked #9 and #10.

The second story still has the original flooring. The boards range from 4-1/2 inches to 8-1/2 inches wide. The extreme north and south rooms have been removed as in the case of the first floor. There have been minor alterations in some of the now existing rooms from that shown in figure 2. When the partitions were removed, it was found that the original nails were of the pounded type, whereas those used today are of the wire-drawn type.

There are four fireplaces on this floor, but they are smaller than those on the first floor, being 2 feet 4 inches by 2 feet 6 inches. There is a hallway that leads from the landing on the staircase from the first to second floor to the second story of the rear building, which originally contained the kitchen on its first floor. This hallway makes it possible to go from the main building to the rear building without going out into the weather. The staircase from the second floor to the third floor is directly over and exactly like the one running from the first floor to the second floor.



On reaching the third floor, the first thing that comes into view is a metal arrow suspended from the ceiling in the hall by a metal rod. On examination, it is found that this rod extends up through the roof and is connected to the weather vane on the top of the house, as shown in figure 4. On this floor there are four more fireplaces of the smaller size, and it can be noticed that the chimneys begin to converge so that whereas they were approximately in the center of the rooms by the time they reach the roof they are only about two feet apart. This applies to the chimneys on both the north and south sides of the building as can be seen in figure 4. By referring to figure 6, as well as figure 4, it will be seen that on the south side of the building (figure 6) the windows are between the fireplaces, while on the north side (figure 4) the windows are to the sides of the fireplaces. Only a portion of the rear windows can be seen in figure 4.

In the attic, the joists over the third floor are 2 inches by 10 inches, spaced 24 inches center to center. The roof joists are 2 inches by 6 inches, and the sheathing 1 inch thick. The roof itself is of tin, while the front and back of the third story is of wooden shingles.

The cellar is reached by a staircase under the staircase from the first to the second floor, or from the outside by a staircase in the rear of the building under room #4. The brick partition, which extends up to the first floor and above divide the cellar

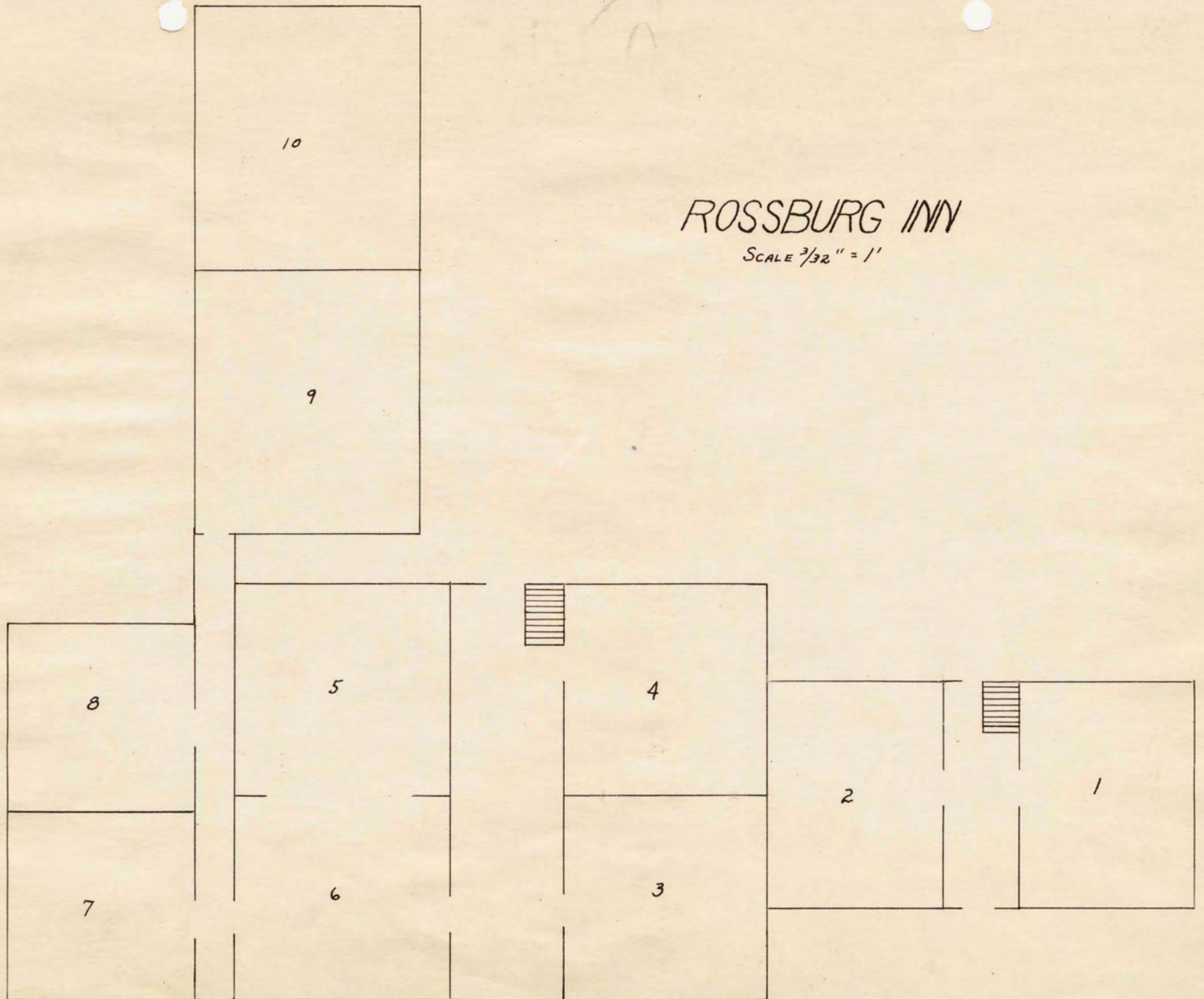
into three rooms. The joists under the first floor are in a state of decay and some of them have been replaced. The original ones in some cases have dropped down about an inch below the floor at the center of their span. These old joists were hewn and are approximately 11 inches by 2-1/2 inches and are spaced approximately 16 inches center to center. The maximum span of these joists is 13 feet and it is interesting to note that there is no bridgework whatever. Evidently it was not the practice in those days to use bridgework for joists.

In this thesis, the writer has endeavored to set forth some of the historical facts in connection with this old building, and to bring out the construction features that are strikingly different from those in modern practice. In this he trusts he has been somewhat successful.

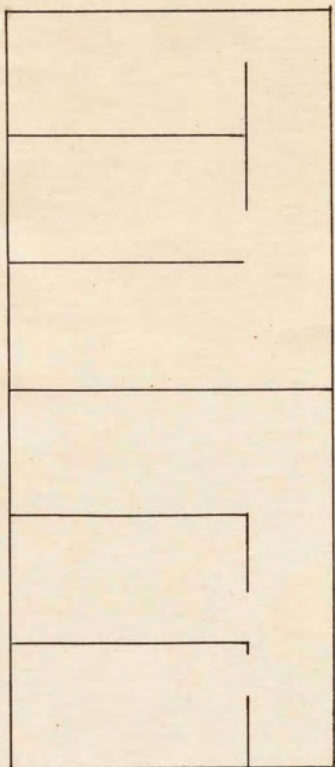


ROSSBURG INN

SCALE  $\frac{3}{32}$ " = 1'

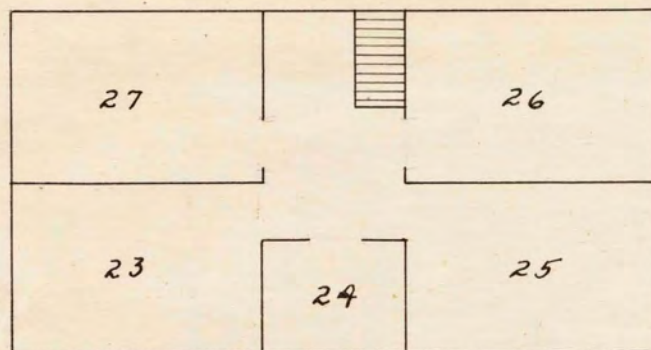


FIRST STORY PLAN

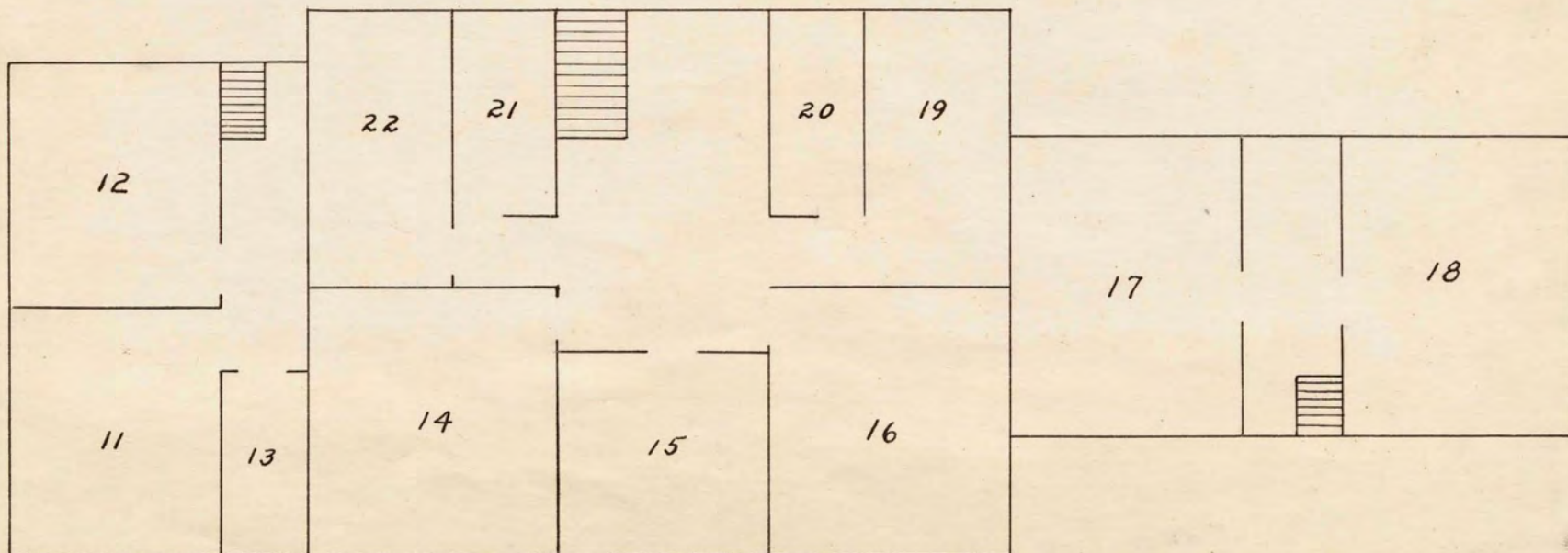


# ROSSBURG INN

SCALE  $\frac{3}{32}$ " = 1'



THIRD STORY PLAN



SECOND STORY PLAN



Figure 3



General view looking north showing Agricultural Experiment Station buildings to left and Dairy Building in background. A good idea of the size of the English elms in front of the building can be obtained.

Figure 4



View looking south, showing front and north sides of building. University of Maryland campus in background.

Figure 5



Front view showing English elms and dairy barns of the University of Maryland to right where original stables stood.

Figure 6



South view showing rear building used for kitchen and well to left.





View of section of south wall, showing English system of bonding the brick and stone resting on ledge formed by change from 19 inch wall to 15 inch wall at first story.



Figure 8

View of main door, showing arch and keystone.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

The information presented throughout this thesis was obtained from the following sources:

Verbally from Dr. H. J. Patterson, Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station of the University of Maryland.

The Reveille of 1897.

Historic Highways of America by Archer Butler Hulbert.

The National Road, published by The National Highways Association.

The writer also examined the fifteen volumes of the "Book of the Royal Blue", a periodical formerly published by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, but failed to find anything bearing directly on the Roszburg Inn.